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ABSTRACT

Recent research into the religious life of college students, though limited, has suggested ways of understanding the religious aspects of personality that exist apart from institutional involvement. To describe the role of religion in the life of college students 254 freshmen were surveyed to determine whether four categories of religious orientation would provide a meaningful description of religious motivation. Students were categorized into one of four religious orientations: (1) extrinsic, in which religion is subordinated to self-needs; (2) intrinsic, in which religious attitudes help to determine behavior; (3) indiscriminately pro-religious, in which religion serves an all-encompassing role in meeting self-needs; and (4) indiscriminately anti-religious, in which religion is rejected. Results provided limited support for the use of the religious orientation scales with non-Christian groups. The relationship between religious orientation and cognitive style was found to hold for dogmatism, but not for intolerance or ambiguity. The findings suggest that disagreement by Jewish students with items on the intrinsic scale may reflect a parochial bias of Christianity. (Author/JAC)

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The Religious Orientation of College Students

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Research Report # 8-81

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Religion has often been a variable of interest to researchers who wish to describe and understand the experience of college students. In the past, most such research has focused on religious beliefs and practices (cf. review by Parker, 1971), or has attempted to describe changes in such beliefs and practices over the course of the college experience (Hasting & Hoge, 1976; Hunsberger, 1978). Recent research that looks specifically at the religious life of college students has been limited, however. Religious researchers seem to have heeded the advice of Dittes (1969), and turned their attention to the homogeneous populations of specific religious traditions, e.g., Catholics (Thompson, 1974; Kahoe, 1976), Protestants (Hood, 1978; King 1967), Baptists (Feagin, 1964; Hood, 1971), and others. Such studies attempted to define and measure religious variables using subjects who were expected to be "religious" to discover what it was that was "religious" about them. Although the results of such studies were limited in their generalizability, they have provided rich data about the religious orientation, beliefs, practices, and attitudes of persons identified with institutional religion, and have suggested ways of understanding the religious aspects of personality that exist apart from institutional involvement.

Other research utilizing college students (e.g., Hood, 1970; Bateson, Naifeh, & Pate, 1978) has tended to be limited in two ways. First, it has not taken account of the developmental issues of the age group. As a result, such studies have tended to find either conservative beliefs or anti-religious attitudes (Dittes, 1969). Perry (1970) has suggested that the beliefs and attitudes of college students must be considered in relation to the cognitive development of late adolescence. Students may hold similar views, but in very different ways, depending on their cognitive development. Second, research on

college students has primarily added to the literature about beliefs defined in orthodox conservative terms. Certainly this has been useful for understanding the nature of institutional practices and orthodox beliefs, but it has failed to tap what many religious leaders would consider an important aspect of religion -- the function of religion in a person's life.

Since current research on the religious interest of college students is scarce, the present study was undertaken to describe the role of religion in the life of students at one large metropolitan university. It seemed important that any attempt to understand the religious attitudes of college students consider the manner in which such attitudes were held rather than just the content of religious beliefs and practices, and also consider the function of religion in a person's life. The concept of religious orientation first conceived by Allport (1963; Allport & Ross, 1967) and developed by numerous others (Feagin, 1964; Hood, 1970, 1971; Wilson, 1960; King & Hunt, 1969) offered a relevant framework for understanding religion in this way.

The Concept of Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religious Orientation

Allport proposed two religious orientations -- intrinsic and extrinsic (I-E). Extrinsic religion was defined as "utilitarian exploitation of religion to provide comfort, status, or needed crutches in one's encounter with life," and intrinsic religion was defined as "life wholly oriented, integrated, and directed by the master value of religion" (Allport, 1968:141). Although Allport's definitions were clearly value-laden and reflected a conservative Christian perspective, considerable research has utilized both his concepts and the Religious Orientation Scale (R.O.S.) that he developed to measure it (cf. review by Hunt & King, 1971). In the process, the I-E concepts have been refined and redefined, evolving to a point where a person with an extrinsic

orientation may be defined as one who "subordinates and tailors religious practices and beliefs to the satisfaction of personal motives," and the person with an intrinsic religious orientation as one who "subordinates and tailors personal motives and practices to the precepts of religion (Dittes, 1971:86). As a personality variable defined in this way, religious orientation should be a useful way to understand the religious attitudes of the heterogeneous western population regardless of religious tradition or affiliation.

From Allport's perspective, intrinsic and extrinsic orientations represented different ends of a continuum. Subsequent research, particularly that by Feagin (1964), King (1967), Hood (1970, 1971, 1978), and Thompson (1974), suggested that I-E orientations represented two separate dimensions rather than a continuum, and argued that four religious orientations: intrinsic, extrinsic, indiscriminately pro-religious, and indiscriminately anti-religious -- would better describe the personality variable under examination. The use of four religious orientations seemed appropriate for our purposes.

Focus of the Study

This study considered two hypotheses concerning the religious orientation of college students.

First, we supposed that the expanded four categories of religious orientation would provide a meaningful description of religious motivation for a heterogeneous sample of college students, a description that was unrelated to the parochial beliefs or institutional practices of Christianity, i.e., regardless of whether students identified with Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, some other religious tradition, or preferred no religious identification. Although this was inconsistent with the interpretation of findings with Buddhist (Patrick, 1979) and Unitarian (Strickland & Weddell, 1972)

subjects, it was consistent with the suggestion that intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientations reflected a basic personality construct of the sort discussed by Dittes (1971).

Second, we expected religious orientation to be related to two aspects of cognitive style: open vs. closed-mindedness and tolerance vs. intolerance for ambiguity. Specifically, we expected to replicate the results of Thompson (1974) who found that adolescents with indiscriminately anti-religious and intrinsic religious orientations exhibited less dogmatism, i.e., more open-mindedness, than other religious orientations; and that indiscriminately pro-religious adolescents exhibited the most dogmatism and therefore a closed-minded cognitive style in relation to the world. This latter expectation would be in line with Allport and Ross' (1967) finding that this group was more prejudiced. Finally, since intolerance for ambiguity has been found to correlate with prejudice (Martin & Westie, 1959) and with an extrinsic religious orientation (King & Hunt, 1972), we expected the indiscriminately pro-religious and the extrinsic religious orientations to exhibit less tolerance for ambiguity than the other two religious orientations.

Method

A representative sample of 254 freshmen students completed an anonymous questionnaire at the University of Maryland, College Park. Most students were 17 or 18 years of age (42% and 56% respectively); 49% were male and 51% were female. Reported religious preference indicated a sample that was 34% Catholic, 25% Protestant, 21% Jewish, 4% "Other," and 16% "None." Most students preferred the religious tradition in which they were reared.

The questionnaire consisted of three sets of scales: the I-E scales factorially derived by Feagin (1964) to assess intrinsic and extrinsic orientation; the short-form 20-item version of Rokeach's Dogmatism Scale developed by Troldahl & Powell (1965); and the Intolerance for Ambiguity Scale developed by Martin and Westie (1959). The order in which the items were presented was determined randomly to reduce response set bias. To increase the generality of the items on the I-E scales, and therefore their relevance to the heterogeneous college population, the wording of several items was modified, e.g., "church" was changed to "religious group." The I-E scales were scored to form four religious orientations using the method suggested by Hood (1970). The items for each of the scales are shown in Tables 1-4.

The internal consistency of the four scales was measured using Chronbach's ALPHA which yielded reliability coefficients as follows: E-Scale = .61, I-Scale = .70, Intolerance for Ambiguity Scale = .72, and the Dogmatism Scale = .70. Item-to-total correlations are shown in Tables 1-4.

Data were analyzed using analysis of variance and Newman-Keuls post hoc tests at the .05 level.

Results

Comparison of Religious Preference

Subjects were asked to indicate both the religion in which they were reared and their religious preference now. Most students (87%) reported a preference for the religious tradition in which they were reared. Those students who reported a change generally endorsed some "Other" preference (4%) or no religious preference (7%). Very few (2%) changed to one of the three major religious traditions, Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish. Since little change in religious affiliation was found in the sample, current religious preference was used to compare subjects on religious orientation.

The five religious preferences were found to be significantly different on both the intrinsic scale and the extrinsic scale. On the intrinsic scale, students electing the non-Christian options were significantly different from those who identified with Christian traditions. Students endorsing the "Other" (mean = 2.69), Jewish (mean = 2.64), or "None" (mean = 2.28) categories tended to disagree with more items on the intrinsic scale than students endorsing Protestantism (mean = 3.12) or Catholism (mean = 3.22).

On the extrinsic scale, the differences among religious preferences were significant, but not as clear. Students endorsing the "Other" (mean = 2.66), or "None" (mean = 2.72) categories also tended to disagree with items on the extrinsic scale and were significantly different from Catholic or Protestant but not Jewish students. Jewish students tended to disagree (mean = 2.96) with fewer items on this scale than on the intrinsic scale and were not significantly different from Catholic (mean = 3.11) or Protestant (mean = 3.12) students.

These results suggested that students in the non-Christian groups tended to disagree with items on both scales, and on the intrinsic more than the extrinsic scale. However, there were problems in our sample that made interpretation of results difficult. The category of "Other" was problematic. In completing the questionnaire, several students who checked the "Other" category designated denominational affiliations that were subsequently coded as Protestant. Only two subjects in this category designated a religious preference (Moslem) that was clearly not in one of the other categories. Since most of the students in this small group (N=16) did not specify a religious preference, it is possible that this was not a non-Christian category. Since it was not clear what this category represented, subjects indicating the "Other" religious preference were eliminated from subsequent analyses.

The response of students in the "None" category (N=42) may also have biased the results, since 80% of those students indicating no religious preference were classified as indiscriminately anti-religious. Subjects in this "None" category represented 32% of the students categorized as indiscriminately anti-religious, and 50% of the non-Christian subjects in this category. Because the response of subjects electing the "None" option for religious preference was so skewed, these subjects were also omitted from subsequent analyses.

Comparison of Religious Orientations on Cognitive Style

The reduced sample of 196 subjects, 61 Protestant, 83 Catholic, and 52 Jewish students, was found to be similar to the original sample on sex (47% female and 53% male), and age (40% 17 years old and 58% 18 years old).

A 4 (religious orientation) X 3 (religious preference) multivariate analysis of variance on cognitive style yielded significant results for religious orientation (Table 5). The four religious orientations were significantly different on dogmatism, but not significantly different on intolerance for ambiguity. Students classified as indiscriminately pro-religious ranked highest on dogmatism (mean = 2.98), followed by those classified as intrinsic (mean = 2.85), extrinsic (mean = 2.83), and indiscriminately anti-religious (mean = 2.73). A Newman-Kuels pairwise comparison indicated that only the indiscriminately pro- and anti-religious categories were significantly different. Although these results were not as strong as those reported by Thompson (1974), they were consistent with his findings and with our expectations.

The four religious orientations were not significantly different on intolerance for ambiguity, nor were they consistent with previous research. The indiscriminately pro-religious were highest on intolerance for ambiguity (mean = 2.48) as expected, but the extrinsic orientation had the lowest intolerance for ambiguity (mean = 2.85).

The overall test of significance for religious preference on cognitive style was not significant, nor was there a significant interaction of religious preference and religious orientation on cognitive style.

Discussion

The results of this study provided limited support for the supposition that the four categories of religious orientation would provide a meaningful description of religious motivation for a heterogeneous sample of college students.

As expected, those students with no religious preference tended to be classified as indiscrimately anti-religious. While their consistent disagreement with items on the I-E scales may have reflected a response set bias or an adolescent rebellion against religious institutions, the fact that 88% of those students who indicated no religious preference also indicated that they were not reared within a particular religion suggested a consistent disavow of religious motivation. It is worth noting that 38% of those students classified as anti-religious endorsed a belief in "a personal God," and 20% believed in a "Supreme Being" (Knight & Sedlacek, 1981). Even though such students tended to be unmotivated to use religion in their lives, they had fairly traditional beliefs about God. Such findings seemed to support Thompson's (1974) suggestion that the indiscriminately anti-religious may have been more discerning than indiscriminate in their rejection of items on the intrinsic and extrinsic scales.

The interpretation of results for the Jewish students suggested that the intrinsic scale offered items that may not have been relevant for Judaism. Very few Jewish students were classified as intrinsic (19%), or indiscriminately pro-religious (20%), categories reflecting agreement with items on the intrinsic scale. Also, many Jewish students (44%) were classified as anti-

religious indicating disagreement with items on both scales. Jewish students did seem to find items on the extrinsic scale somewhat relevant, though, since 27% of Jewish respondents were classified as extrinsic, indicating agreement on the extrinsic scale.

The results for Jewish students and those in the "None" category suggested that religious orientation as a personality variable may best be understood as a learned phenomenon. This is particularly evident in the difficulty which these non-Christian groups had with the intrinsic scale. In this sense, the results reflect real differences between the religious traditions. Catholics and Protestants were more likely to view the pietistic practices which dominated the intrinsic scale as viable ways to organize experience.

Such results support the contention that at least the intrinsic concept as it is operationalized by this scale reflects the parochial bias of Christianity. Further research is necessary to determine whether this is an artifact of the measurement scale or an accurate assessment of the intrinsic concept.

Although the non-Christian groups found less agreement with the intrinsic scale, this difference among religious traditions did not account for a significant amount of variance in dogmatism. Religious motivation seemed more a reflection of such cognitive variables as open-mindedness than a reflection of institutional religious background. Such an interpretation is consistent with the findings of Pargament, Steele, & Tyler (1979) who found that institutional religious identification of Protestants, Catholics and Jewish subjects was not significantly related to psychosocial competence, while intrinsic religious motivation was.

Much of the research on religious orientation assumes that religious orientation reflects a stable personality construct. Such an assumption may not be valid with the late adolescent population measured in this study.

Recent theories of cognitive (Perry, 1970) and moral development (Kohlberg, & Turrel, 1973) suggest that religious orientation and cognitive style relate to developmental stages rather than cohesive personality constructs. Meyer (1977) found that intellectual development could be measured cross-sectionally by analyzing the religious beliefs of students. His work was based on Perry's assumption that similar beliefs may be held in different ways at different stages of intellectual development. For instance, in the early stages of dualism, beliefs are unconsidered and dogmatic, while at the later stage of committment beliefs are chosen after examination and the student is open to others choosing differently. The relationship between religious orientation and dogmatism found in this study seemed consistent with this developmental scheme. Students with a pro-religious orientation were the most dogmatic and their pro-religious orientation reflected an unconsidered endorsement or religious precepts in spite of their contradictions. Those students with less dogmatic anti-religious and intrinsic religious orientations may be at a later stage of intellectual development. The need for longitudinal research is obvious to determine if the religious orientation of college students changes over time. However, such longitudinal research must consider not only the content of religious beliefs and practices, but also the way in which such beliefs are held and the role which religion plays in the structure of the personality.

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Table 1

Extrinsic Scale*
(E-Scale)

Item	Item-Total Correlation
10. The purpose of prayer is to secure a happy and peaceful life.	.44
27. The primary purpose of prayer is to gain relief and protection.	.36
32. What religion offers most is comfort when sorrow and misfortune strike.	.29
36. A religious group is most important as a place to formulate good social relationships.**	.39
43. One reason for my being a member of a religious group is that such membership helps to establish a person in the community.**	.23
47. Religion helps to keep my life balanced and steady in exactly the same way as my citizenship, friendships, and other memberships do.	.34

Chronbach's alpha = .61

* Items factorially derived by Feagin (1964)

** The wording of these items was modified in order to increase relevance of item to a non-Christian religious group.

Items scored so that 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree

Table 2

Intrinsic Scale*
(I-Scale)

Item	Item-Total Correlation
4. If not prevented by unavoidable circumstances, I attend religious services at least once a week or oftener, two or three times a month, once every month or two, rarely, never.**	.46
8. I read literature about my faith (or religious group) frequently, occasionally, rarely, never.**	.48
16. The prayers I say when I am alone carry as much meaning and personal emotion as those said by me during services.	.17
26. I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life.	.59
33. My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.	.52
40. It is important to me to spend periods of time in private thought and meditation.	.47

Chronbach's alpha = .70

* Items factorially derived by Feagin (1964)

** The wording of these items was modified in order to increase the relevance of item to a non-Christian religious group.

Table 3

Intolerance for Ambiguity Scale*

Item	Item-Total Correlation
15. There is only one right way to do anything.	.45
23. You can classify almost all people as either honest or crooked.	.52
25. A person is either a 100% American or he isn't.	.41
30. It doesn't take very long to find out if you can trust a person.	.27
35. There are two kinds of women: the pure and the bad.	.50
39. A person either knows the answer to a question or he doesn't.	.40
45. There are two kinds of people in the world: the weak and the strong.	.51

Chronbach's alpha = .72

* Martin & Westie (1959)

Table 4

Item-Total Correlation	Item #	Short Form of Rokeach's Dogmatism Scale*
.29	22.	In this complicated world of ours the only way we can know what's going on is to rely on leaders or experts who can be trusted.
.07	24.	My blood boils whenever a person stubbornly refuses to admit he's wrong.
.40	28.	There are two kinds of people in this world: those who are for the truth and those who are against the truth.
.44	29.	Most people just don't know what's good for them.
.39	31.	Of all the different philosophies which exist in this world there is probably only one which is correct.
.18	18.	The highest form of government is a democracy and the highest form of democracy is a government run by those who are most intelligent.
.27	34.	The main thing in life is for a person to want to do something important.
.20	37.	I'd like it if I could find someone who would tell me how to solve my personal problems.
.20	38.	Most of the ideas which get printed nowadays aren't worth the paper they are printed on.
.41	41.	Man on his own is a helpless and miserable creature.
.30	42.	It is only when a person devotes himself to an ideal or cause that life becomes meaningful.
.25	44.	Most people just don't give a "damn" for others.
.45	46.	To compromise with our political opponents is dangerous because it usually leads to the betrayal of our own side.
.07	9.	It is often desirable to reserve judgment about what's going on until one has had a chance to hear the opinions of those one respects.
.32	17.	The present is all too often full of unhappiness. It is only the future that counts.
.26	19.	The United States and Russia have just about nothing in common.

Table 4 - Cont'd.

.25	21.	In a discussion I often find it necessary to repeat myself several times to make sure I am being understood.
.21	11.	While I don't like to admit this even to myself, my secret ambition is to become a great man, like Einstein, or Beethoven, or Shakespeare.
.27	12.	Even though freedom of speech for all groups is a worthwhile goal, it is unfortunately necessary to restrict the freedom of certain political groups.
.21	14.	It is better to be a dead hero than to be a live coward.

* Troldahl & Powell, 1965.

** Chronbach's Alpha = .70

Table 5

Mean Dogmatism and Intolerance for Ambiguity Scores by Religious Orientation of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish Students

Religious Orientation	Dogmatism*		Intolerance for Ambiguity	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Pro-religious (N=64)	2.98	.43	2.48	.68
Intrinsic (N=38)	2.85	.36	2.43	.64
Extrinsic (N=34)	2.83	.37	2.25	.56
Anti-religious (N=60)	2.73	.38	2.31	.55

*MANOVA F,6,366 = 2.50, p .022